Hornets' Nest part four - A Sting in the Tale, by Paul Magrs

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(The CD has a recap of the previous stories, with extracts.)

(Tom Baker's opening Doctor Who theme, composed by Ron Grainer.)

ANNOUNCER: (Tom Baker) Doctor Who. Hornets' Nest. A Sting In The Tale, by Paul Magrs. Starring Tom Baker and Richard Franklin.

THE DOCTOR: I stepped from the TARDIS into darkness. The ground was frozen hard and the very air tingled with cold. I had arrived at a vast woodland deep in the heart of Winter - far, far back in Earth's past. The forest around me creaked and groaned with the weight from the accumulated snow. The light from the pen torch I had brought with me was feeble at best, probing gingerly into the endless shadows. It seemed so beknighted, and so denuded of life, and yet the TARDIS's instruments suggested a place teeming with life forms, millions of them, and the area of the country buzzing with activity. So where were they? Was everyone hibernating? Did the whole of England sleep away the endless Winters of the Dark Ages?
MIKE YATES: Are you sure you weren't back in Norfolk?
THE DOCTOR: I was in quite a different time and place, Mike. Further North, much further back.
MIKE YATES: And how had you found your way there this time?
THE DOCTOR: Another written account I had found, this time a record in the TARDIS's data banks, concerning a strange occurrence at Tilling Abbey. Long gone by the Twenty-First Century, the abbey was once a thriving centre of religious observance for womenfolk. But something happened there in the year Ten Thirty-Nine, and for years afterwards stories circulated of rabid dogs and demonic flying insects. If I was looking for the earliest indication of hornet life on the planet, this seemed as likely a lead as any. The TARDIS, I hoped, had had the good sense to drop me close by. Of course, by springing upon the ladies of the abbey unexpected I had no idea what kind of a reception I'd receive.
MIKE YATES: Cordial, one would hope.
THE DOCTOR: It was anything but, I'm afraid, Mike.
MIKE YATES: Can be unpredictable, nuns.
THE DOCTOR: Mm.

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) Heading in what the readout suggested was the right direction, I felt as though I was some ethereal spirit of Midwinter misrule, crunching through the frosty undergrowth and making for home in the middle of the night. Perhaps I was careless, too reckless, crashing through the branches. The twiggy fingers of the trees tugging at my scarf and trying to snare me. I believe I even sang, yes, loudly, in order to keep myself company. (Singing) "Good King Wenceslas looked out, on the Feast of Stephen, mark my pages rub my feet, though the frogs are cruel..." You get the idea. On reflection, it was inevitable that my noisy approach would be noted. I was wandering blithely into the trap of expert hunters. As the woodlands began to thin out I caught a glimpse of pale fields dense with snow rising before me. My hearts leapt up inside me at the sight of all that open land dozing beneath the full moon. I flung myself at the deep fields of snow, feeling that I had triumphed somehow against the very soul of the forest, which had tried so hard to snag and drag me backwards. And yet, the whole time I had been under the creaking canopy, someone had been watching my back... (Sounds of a pack of barking dogs begin to be heard.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) ... monitoring my noisy presence, waiting for me to trip. Now I was in the open fields, they came after me, keen not to lose their newfound prey. They had to bring me down. Because I was new in that endless dark forest, the cold hadn't yet got to me. I was a warm, juicy morsel in a frigid landscape. So I could hardly escape the notice of the starving animal hordes. The undergrowth bristled, the frozen grasses were rustling. I started to run. My

boots churned up great swathes of heavy snow as I tore headlong into the field. My progress was made all the more difficult by a steep gradient. I was running up a hill towards - I hoped - the building that the TARDIS had noted. I turned. I paused and I turned, just as ... more of those terrible howls rent the air, a ghastly frenedy of hungry music. I blinked, shaking the snow out of my hair and my scarf, and I flailed my pathetic torch-light about, trying to illumine the way I had come. There was a flash of hard, flinty eyes, multiple pairs, some closer than others, one pair very close indeed.
(Growling.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) I was frozen to the spot as the owner broke from the pack and came bounding through my furrowed snow-tracks. I fell backwards with a great cry as the hound flung herself upon me...
(Snarling.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) Her great slavering jaws lavished red-hot slobber all over me. The attack stopped as suddenly as it had begun. A louder, more resolent cry tore through the night, and my assailant yelped resentfully. She was letting me go. I staggered backwards into the snow with alacrity, still covered in hot slobber.
(Growls.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) The creature stared at me with blazing hatred. For a second our eyes locked, and then incredibly, she turned and ran, pelting back into the woods. Ahead of me, further up the hill, rose human cries.

THE SISTER: He's here. We've got him. Look! It has spared him.

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) I turned to see three newcomers, in furs even heavier and more cumbersome than the hounds' winter coat, hastening down the snowy slope towards me. They carried flaming torches, whose golden light was a very welcome sight as I picked myself up to face them.

THE SISTER: What are you doing out here alone? Didn't you know about the wild hounds?

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) She let down her hood in order to speak to me, and I was amazed to see the very beautiful face of a young woman creased with irritation as she questioned me. I stammered an apology which she waved brusquely away. They more or less dragged me up the rest of the hill. We crested the brow, and the moon shone fully upon the edifice before us. Their home. It was a vast impregnable city of stone, baleful and high above a world of wintry trees. A nunnery, deep in the heart of the tangled countryside.

THE DOCTOR: I say, I wonder if you'd have a hot toddy on the go, or whatever passes for refreshment these days up there at that nunnery of yours?
THE SISTER: The Reverend Mother will want to see you.

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) As long as I got my hot toddy, it didn't matter what she asked me. However, once indoors and peering down at a bowl of barley soup with rancid butter floating in it, I couldn't help but be ... disappointed. It wasn't quite the brew I had fondly imagined. The nuns told me that I was somewhere in Northumbria, a wild and unsettled place, even in your time, Mike. Back then it was a wilderness. As I pretended to be enjoying the refreshments enormously, I was aware in the guttering candlelight of the other nuns hovering at my back. They were both wary of and fascinated by me. They had probably never seen anything like me before. And then, I noticed something most unexpected. At close quarters, their combined breath carried the unmistakable tang of ... whisky. I felt almost woozy just being in the same room as them.

THE DOCTOR: Run your own distillery here, do you? Useful source of income, I dare say.
THE SISTER: The fermentation of grain is an art, handed down through generations of our sisterhood.
THE DOCTOR: It beats macram hands down - do you all imbibe, huh? Novel.
THE SISTER: Not everyone likes the taste, but for those of us who do, it keeps the cold at bay.
THE DOCTOR: And cheers many a long evening, I dare say.
THE SISTER: Why were you trekking through the winter woods alone?
THE DOCTOR: Well, I like to wander, you know. I don't really need a reason to go rambling

about anywhere and the weather rarely bothers me. However, I confess, I am actually on a quest.
THE NUN: He seeks the Divinity, sister.
THE SISTER: I thought so. Guard the sanctum. Whoever sent you, man, take word back that we will never give up that which we protect and honour.
THE DOCTOR: I can assure you nobody sent me. But what is this thing you protect?
THE SISTER: Feign what ignorance you will. Everyone in this area knows of our Mother Superior, and the light that shines in her eyes.
THE DOCTOR: Really? And how long has that been going on for?
THE SISTER: She was rescued by the sisters three months ago. They found her wandering in the woods alone, save for the tiny souls dancing in the centres of her eyes.
THE DOCTOR: I think you'd better let me see her.
THE SISTER: We do not grant audiences with her.
THE DOCTOR: Trust me, I'm a Doctor, Sister, and I have a very nasty feeling that I know more about your Mother Superior than you do, probably more than she knows about herself, in fact.
THE NUN: Sister, night is falling. First watch have seen the attackers starting to gather outside.
THE SISTER: You know what to do. Marshall the sisters. Our defences grow weaker each day.
THE DOCTOR: More of those dogs we heard outside?
THE SISTER: It's been three months now. The spirit to defend remains high, but I fear our sisters grow tired in the body.
THE DOCTOR: You said it was three months since you rescued your Mother Superior.
THE SISTER: They are the Devil's hounds, sent to test our faith.
THE DOCTOR: Sister, I implore you. Let me speak with your Mother Superior. I'm here on the trail of an evil force, a malignant entity formed from the souls of many millions of creatures, and I believe that you all might be somehow caught up in it.
THE SISTER: Very well. Beware, Doctor. The sanctum is both barred and guarded, so you alone can do no harm.

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) She led me down narrow passageways to a room at the very heart of the abbey, an inner sanctum, outside of which stood two nuns carrying hefty spears. Heavy locks were pulled back with effort, the door opened, and I walked in. I've been brought before some very important leaders and heads of state in my time, Mike. I have visited some extremely interesting Supreme Beings in their magnificent thronerooms. They've always had quite a lot to say for themselves. I wasn't quite sure what to think at first when I was brought before the Abbess. Were the sisters having a joke with me? Perhaps. I approached, very cautiously. The light was smoky and dim. The Mother Superior was hunched upon the floor, her wimple all awry. Rather messy for a Reverend Mother, I remember thinking. Not much decorum as she received a stranger in her room. I said: "Hello, my dear. Are you unwell?" And then I saw her. She raised her dewy nose with a questioning air. Her whiskers trembled with wariness. She was snuffling, trying to work out whether I was a friend or foe. "It's all right. It's all right, Mother Superior." The divinity guarded by the sisters answered me.
(Pig grunting.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) She was a pig. Just an ordinary pig, sitting there. Rather confused, rather out of her element. She had no idea why the sisters revered her so. I was pretty puzzled myself. I sat carefully, quietly, in front of the pig, mesmerising her gently. Or at least, having a go. I stared into her eyes, and she started back into mine.
(Multiple buzzing sounds of the swarm begin to be heard.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) I remembered what the sister had said, about the dancing lights, the brilliance in her eyes, and I could see that brilliance now. I had seen it before. Oh yes. I had heard that noise before. The humming drone. But now it was slightly different, more rarefied, almost musical. The pig was a rare beast. Within her I was sure lay the Queen of the hive, the Queen in all her glory, with her servants and workers somewhere deep inside this primitive creature, glaring back at me with, what? Hatred? Surprise?

THE DOCTOR: Oh no, my dear, you don't get me. I can feel you probing, twitching, eager to be out of your porcine prison. (Laugh.) Why are you stuck there? That's the question, eh?
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THE DOCTOR: (narrating) I backed away very gradually. The pig stared back, implacable, possessed. Quite terrifying in her beatific blankness. I called the sisters to let me out again.

THE DOCTOR: Quite charming, your Mother Superior. Doesn't say much though, does she?
THE SISTER: She does not need to say much. Her eyes. Did you not see the love that is in her eyes? The dancing lights.
THE DOCTOR: You don't know what you've brought into your abbey.
THE SISTER: She is our Divinity.

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) Later that afternoon, I was a witness to the stresses that these poor girls were under as the hounds attacked in full force. Joining them on the battlements, I watched the Sun burn across the top of the forest canopy causing deathly shadows to lengthen across the snow.
(Barking dogs begin to be heard)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) Soon the hounds came darting out of the undergrowth, gnashing, and sending their bellowing cries up to the heavens. I should hardly have been surprised by now, but the nuns had slingshots, and bows and arrows, and great cauldrons for tipping boiling oil off the battlements onto intruders. I was most impressed by how they all kept their heads. One strapping girl quite matter-of-factly sent blazing arrows arching through the snowy air. I was full of admiration. I studied the beasts as they came creeping towards the castle, and soon picked out the leader of their pack, a huge brute, thick with muscle and winter coat. A wolf hound with savage amber eyes. And they all had a demeanour I recognised - a detached, almost haunted air of single-minded determination.

THE DOCTOR: Sister, these dogs are possessed by the same beings as your Mother Superior.
THE SISTER: You blaspheme against the Reverend Mother.
THE DOCTOR: Your Reverend Mother is possessed by a terrible power.
THE SISTER: We are being tested. The strength of our faith is evinced by the protection we give our most holy resident.
THE DOCTOR: I'm sorry, but you are wrong. This isn't to do with your faith. It's an alien force, something unknown on Earth. A swarm of creatures who can inhabit and possess almost anything. People, inanimate objects, pigs.
THE SISTER: Enough.
THE DOCTOR: I have come a very long way. I have learnt much about them. I have faced these creatures again and again. That pig was not sent to enlighten you spiritually, and those dogs outside are not there to test your faith. It is my belief that you have something they want very badly, and they won't stop until they get it back.
THE SISTER: You believe there is some form of pest inside the hounds, controlling them?
THE DOCTOR: Yes. Exactly.
THE SISTER: The Devil is legion. He is lord of the insect world. You merely confirm my beliefs, Doctor.
THE NUN: Sister!
THE DOCTOR: I saw with a shock that the nun's robes had been torn. Her flesh had been gashed by savage claws.
THE NUN: Sister, we are being invaded.
THE SISTER: How is this possible? What have they done?

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) The younger nun almost collapsed in a dead faint. I ran to her and saw how much blood she had lost.

THE NUN: They came in through the kitchens. We were distracted. They are too clever, too strong. We have bolted the inner doors, but ... they are here.

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) She fell unconscious into my arms.

THE SISTER: We are doomed.
THE DOCTOR: Not necessarily. If we let them get what they want, I can try to lead them away from this place.
THE SISTER: No, Doctor. You cannot destroy our faith. You might be the Devil himself as far as we know. I must protect the Reverend Mother.

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) As she raced to the inner sanctum, I made my way to the main

gates to watch their failing defences. The nuns worked in quiet concert as they tried to bolster the gates, piling pews and anything heavy that came to hand against the wooden doors.
(Dogs barking.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) But I could hear the avid shrieking of the dogs. Tonight they would be in, no matter what. They were making a final desperate assault on the nunnery. Suddenly, with regret, I knew that this had to run its course. I had seen inside the eyes of the possessed pig in the inner sanctum, and I knew that the hornet soldiers were inside these dogs, desperate to get their Queen back. I couldn't stop them, nobody could, Mike. When the main door to the entrance hall eventually cracked into splinters, the gigantic male wolf hound came bounding and slavering into our midst.
(Growling.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) The nuns fled deeper into their home towards the inner sanctum, but nothing could hold the dogs back. As if following the scent of a fox, they bounded as one down the echoing passageways, flowing towards their Queen like water channeling to the sea.
(Barking of many hounds.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) I allowed myself to be carried along with them, to a scene of carnage, where dogs leapt upon nuns and took them in their jaws, shaking them like old rags.
(Snarling and barking.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) The abbey was turning into a slaughterhouse before my eyes. Until one of the sisters, her faith clearly tested to the limit, pulled back the locks and admitted them. The leader of the pack, the wolf hound, went first. He gave a snarl of horrible triumph as he padded into the holy of holies. I held my breath and followed as quietly as I possibly could. In the dimly-lit inner sanctum, I heard the low deadly growl of the wolf hound, his claws scraped on the cold stone floor. His prey knew she was discovered. From the far end of the room there came a whimper, a terrified squeal, as the pig scented the creature coming her way. I squinted into the darkness, and saw her brilliant eyes widen with fear. A hound like that would make easy work of a helpless sow. One great snap of his slavering chops ... Little pig, little pig, let me come in - I'll huff and I'll puff. But the Mother Superior shrugged off her wimple and bravely drew herself up to her fullest height, her snout quivered, but she stood her ground as the wolf hound approached. She was quite on her own. Her sisters were busy elsewhere, fighting for their lives. This was no ordinary pig, Mike. Even the wolf hound was starting to realise that. He slobbered and growled and licked his foaming lips. He could smell something unique about this pig. Within the pig lay his objective, his Queen. He knew she was there. The creatures buzzing inside his primitive brain, they knew they had found what they had come for. Could it be? Yes, it could. I watched as the pig stared back at the deadly hound, transfixing him with her stare. I heard and felt the buzz of the hornets filling the stonewalled room, sawing at my senses.
(Buzzing of many insects.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) I saw the hornets pouring out of their humble hostess. Her nostrils and ears and eye ducts suddenly teemed with their agitated bodies, which emerged and grew into billows of smoke. The tiny bodies swirled like some ghastly incense in that holy place. Even as I tell you about it, Mike, it seemed like some awful dream. But I assure you it's all true, every weird moment of it. Now it was the wolf hound's turn to whimper as the lowlier hornets inside his own form recognised what was emerging now. Here came the Queen, a flash of liquid gold. Very little pomp and circumstance, but we knew it was her, protected in the eye of the storm as she exited the Reverend Mother. The pig slumped to the ground, insensible, vacant eyed. The wolf hound whimpered tremulously as the storm entered him. He yelped with pleasurable fear as the Queen and her guards and her most loyal intimate hundreds poured into his savage frame. From one primitive form into another. I wondered briefly why the nuns had escaped possession by the hornets. Why had the Queen stayed inside a mere pig? As one of the sisters cowered next to me, her warm anxious breath on my face, I realised all of a sudden what the answer was. The holy sisters were simply fizzing with it, with the grain they fermented and the tipple they imbibed to keep away the winter chill. But could it be true? Was every one of the human shells that the swarm inhabited a teetotaler? And was the byproduct of botanical fermentation really a deterrent to this inexorable alien swarm? I had no time to mull it over now. The hound's jaws clashed as he whirled around and about. The swarm was completely within him now. The same evil intelligence glowed within his eyes. He bounded past me with a snicker of contempt, it seemed. As he burst into the hall, where the doughty nuns were still fighting to protect their abbey, I saw the other dogs raise their heads in urgent inquiry. They seemed satisfied then. The Queen had been rescued by her drones. A wonderful reunion was occurring. As the wolf hound turned to gather his forces, I watched clouds of

insects rise from the bodies of the dogs. They emerged, and gathered in the air like smoke.

(Buzzing of insects.)
THE SISTER: What is happening? The Mother - did you save the Reverend Mother?
THE DOCTOR: She's alive. But the light in her eyes is out, I'm afraid. She's just a humble pig once more.
THE SISTER: Those insects. Where do they come from? Are they attacking the wolf hound? Is this the Devil come to claim his own?

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) We watched them as the swarm flowed into the wolf hound. Every single hornet in this time and place rallied to the host body where the Queen had taken up residence.

THE DOCTOR: Got them!
THE SISTER: What? What are you saying?
THE DOCTOR: I've got them! They're all in one place, inside one body. I can take them away from here.
THE SISTER: You can free our abbey of this scourge?

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) That was indeed my objective, but what could I possibly do to draw the wolf hound after me, away from this place? And then in a blinding flash I realised. Do you remember, Mike, my visit to the general store in Blandford some eight hundred years later? Well, a crumpled packet of aniseed balls still remained in my jacket pocket, delicious and licoricey, and just the kind of thing to drive a true doggie bananas. I held them in front of me, like a prize. The wild pack swayed and sniffed the air. I watched the pack captain's pupils dilate as he was frozen by desire for a few fraught seconds. The savaged nuns around him looked perplexed. It was long enough for me to dart away, to pelt down the stone corridor and back to the ruined main entrance. I was running out on them all, I was leaving the surviving nuns to their own devices, but I was taking the pack leader with me. The gigantic dog, his eyes big as saucers, came romping after me towards the drawbridge. His paws banged hard on the wooden boards. He bayed at the moon as we emerged into the open air, and I ran for all I was worth, the half pound of fennel-scented sweets held aloft before me, so that their tantalising scent streamed out and kept him coming. My hearts were pounding fit to burst by the time I was under the forest canopy again. My noisy flight woke creatures of all kinds as I thrust myself between the close-grown trees. I hoped that I could find the TARDIS again. The wolf hound bayed like fury, bounding through the woods almost at my heels, and within his crazed mind, I had the hornets, every single one of them. I was luring them, I was winning, I had them in my grasp at last. And then, ahead of me, bright blue, beautiful in the inky dark night, her windows and lamp lit up a fierce ice-white, the TARDIS! I clattered against the lock with my key, my fingers numbed by cold. I turned to see how far behind my pursuer was, and at that moment he leapt at me. Flinging up both arms in defence I toppled backwards into the ship. He tore at my hands, biting hard into the nerves of one, so that I felt the flesh ripping. He then bounded over my collapsed form and into the TARDIS itself, just as the doors slammed shut behind me.
(TARDIS door closing with burring sound.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) I picked myself up and cried out with pain. Suddenly, the shining control room seemed to sway and dip alarmingly, as I staggered over to the console. Whatever poisons were in the dog's sputum were now coursing through my bloodstream, and who knows what diseases the hounds of that age carried? But where was the culprit himself? He had burst into the room and pounded through the inner door, mad with bloodlust, and confounded by the unexpected interior of the ship. I was horrified to see the TARDIS's defences being breached like this. What had I done? I had ushered the wolf hound into my home, and with him, the deadly swarm itself. Adrenalin joined the poisons flooding through me, and my off-kilter mind struggled with the information of recent hours. Hadn't I set out with just this aim in mind? I had pitched myself into the past in order to find the earliest possible traces of my insect enemies. Having found them, I had lured them aboard my ship. I had succeeded, surely, in purging the Middle Ages of their awful menace?
(TARDIS dematerialisation sound.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) With that thought in mind, I set to work on the controls and plunged us swiftly into the vortex, leaving behind the frozen wilderness of Northumbria. I took us

outside of Space and Time, into that curious region in which things are twined into one endlessly spinning moment. I was determined not to return to any particular location until I had managed some measure of control over my foes. The captain of the feral pack was bounding along the gleaming corridors, howling and gnashing his teeth, his huge eyes were burning with desire. He had the savour of my blood in his mouth, and neither he nor the hive mind of the insects that controlled him had ever tasted anything like it before. As you may or may not know, Mike, the TARDIS is huge. Its corridors loop round and about and twist perpetually into a vast cat's cradle, a labyrinth, and yet I had to find them. Muzzy and in pain, I set off in pursuit of the dog, orienting myself by his still-echoing cries. I was armed as ever with nothing more than my sonic screwdriver, and my wits, but I was sure I would think of something. I had to. I ploughed down corridors and scarpered through a bewildering variety of rooms and spaces, many of them crammed perplexingly with items of furniture. Stately antiques from all periods of history, not just Earth, but of other planets, including Gallifrey. There were treasures from a thousand worlds, and portraits stern and smiling, fond ... and unfamiliar. In my rabid-like stupor I began to wonder who all these people were. Was I supposed to know them? Faces, and faces upon faces. Was I supposed to remember all of these? Holograms flickered and danced alongside the oil paintings, the multidimensional statues, the limpid water-colour sketches.
(Door opens - classical music playing.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) There were rooms filled with chamber music...
(Door opens - laughing crowd.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) Rooms filled with laughter....
(Door opens - rushing water.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) Rooms filled with the thunderous applause of waterfalls.
(Door opens - ticking.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) Rooms filled with clocks, ticking, ticking, like the insect clicking of tiny mandibles. The air was quivering with the shock-waves of infiltration. Dust came drifting down where it had been disturbed, sifting like flour in every room. I was seized by a sudden dread. What if in being bitten by the dog captain, I had also been infected by the hornets? What if they were already now within me?

(This is where the radio ended part one and started part two.)

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) I paused inside a great library, swaying with nausea. Every book seemed to be identical, and try as I might I couldn't read the title. My perception felt addled. Was I already enslaved to their group mind? Or were these merely the fevered dreams of a man infected and dying from a mediaeval dog bite? No. This was my TARDIS. I knew where I was - I was safe here. This had been my refuge for hundreds of years. We protected each other, the old girl and I. Nothing could hurt me in here, nothing could get inside. But then I thought uneasily of those malignant forces that *had* managed to insinuate themselves in the past. The Mandragora Helix. The insane Egyptian God, Sutekh. The TARDIS was not impregnable, not by a long chalk. I had to go on. I had to find the hornet swarm. My head seemed to be clearing at intervals, as my Time Lord defences fought back against the canine diseases. Slowly, I was pulling through. I dashed through an English country garden. I hurtled through a swamp I never even knew I had. A laboratory, a garage, a sitting-room to rival Napoleon The Third's in the Louvre Palace, until I became unsure of who was chasing who. Was I the hunter or the hunted? We ran in great exhausting circles until eventually by chance it seemed, we ran into each other. I burst out of a tropical greenhouse into yet another library. This one was crammed with leather-bound tomes. There was a decidedly corrupt and smoky ambience, like the study of some ancient necromancer who had just this minute fled the room and left a wolfhound sitting in his velvet chair. The dog was panting from the chase. He looked as panicked by the vertiginous dimensions of my ship as I expected him to. He and his hornet masters must have believed they were lost forever within the pocket universe of the TARDIS.

(Growling.)
THE DOCTOR: Good boy. Good boy...
(Growling.)

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) The hound growled low in his throat, until the voice of the hornets' nest emerged from him, a distillation of the many thousands of hornet voices inside of him.

THE SWARM: Where have you brought us to? This is not the landscape in which we first encountered you.
THE DOCTOR: No, we've left that planet now. Tell me, how did you arrive on Earth? Did someone take you there?
THE SWARM: We fly of our own accord. We inhabit the darkness of Space. We were blown to this world through the very depths of night.
THE DOCTOR: I see. An accident. And having discovered that animal life provides good mobile homes, you decided to make the best of it.
THE SWARM: The quadrupeds were easy to control as we acclimatised to our new environment.
THE DOCTOR: Whoever was in the pig drew the short straw, being stumbled on by the sisters like that.
THE SWARM: Our Queen.
THE DOCTOR: Ah, so that's why the others wanted her back so badly.
THE SWARM: The female humans kept her prisoner.
THE DOCTOR: Why didn't she just hop out of the pig into a nun, and walk out of there?
THE SWARM: Those humans were ... contaminated.
THE DOCTOR: Nuns? Contaminated? Their very name is a byword for purity. Going about their own business making their ... Ah. It really was the alcohol that put you off, wasn't it? All those whisky fumes. You wouldn't like the Isle of Islay.
THE SWARM: Enough! Who are you? Why have you brought us here?
THE DOCTOR: I have taken you out of Time. You are aboard my ship now. Though I'm not sure if that was a terribly wise thing to do.

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) The huge dog's eyes were wide. He was foaming at the mouth by now, whimpering in terror at the language emanating from his own body. Suddenly he leapt and jerked into action. I turned to run, in no doubt this time about who was chasing who. More corridors, more rooms I had never seen, galleries and walkways, staircases and escalators, voices cried out to me, "Doctor, wait!" Where they came from I had no idea. Then I was in some kind of galley kitchen, the air inexplicably laced with the aroma of flaming cr□pe suzette. I dimly remembered a brochure about computer-controlled catering. Cordon bleu, of course. The hungry dog was beguiled by the aroma of food, and stayed there a while, hunting and snuffling for sustenance as I ploughed onwards. If I could just find my way to the Power Room, the heart of the TARDIS. I knew a quick route back from there to the control room. But my senses were still corrupted, and I began to fear I was lost in the TARDIS's inner catacombs. Sated by a pancake or four, the hound caught up with me again in a well-appointed sitting-room, with French windows open onto a terrace. His eyes were luminous with hatred and greed.

THE SWARM: Is your mind as labyrinthine as your vehicle, Doctor? We would know you now. We would join with you, taste your thoughts.

(Multiple insects buzzing.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) And then something happened that I had seen only hours before, and I felt a very real sense of fear. The Swarm began to leave the host body. The dog's eyes went blank, drained of all evil intent as that glistening smoke issued out of him. The microscopic insects crawled from his tear ducts and gathered noisily. They formed a buzzing cloud between us in this strange study. They were coming for me, hoping to take possession of me, at last. The hound collapsed from exhaustion, his eyes closed as he lay, the churning morass of insect forms turned almost lazily on the air, and surrounded me. In the next few moments my whole world became infested. I could see nothing but random dots and clots of darkness and the whirring of busily intent tiny wings. They buzzed and hummed and formed a perfect cacophony of insect music, and miniaturising themselves once again, they slipped into my mind, as easily as you would slip gratefully into bed for a well-earned sleep, Mike. The insects quivered and shook their miniscule forms with pleasure as they began not just to read my mind, but to unify with it, to seize control of it, to be at one with me. I cried out, roared with horror and dismay. I had miscalculated. They were too strong, I had left myself open and my ship also to their mercy. I had made a vast mistake. I could feel them start to devour me from the inside. Dismally, I thought of those others I had seen possessed by these creatures. They never escaped, did they? Even when the hornets left their bodies behind they were like empty

shells, able to be reoccupied at any moment. I could feel them crawling under my skin, inside every fibre of my being, they were sampling and tippling and tickling at the future, trying to drain me of all I knew, and of everything that made me unique. Now when they spoke, their voice seemed to emanate from deep within my mind.

THE SWARM: You cannot fight us, Doctor. Let us discuss your taking us back to Earth.
THE DOCTOR: No. There's nothing for you there. I can't - I won't take you.
THE SWARM: Your mind tells another story. Your innermost thoughts remind us that the future has already happened for you, Lord of Time. We have heard of such beings. Whispers and rumours of a cosmic race. It is said that your powers are ... godlike.
THE DOCTOR: No. We are mere watchers. Some of us are dabblers. But in the great scheme of things, we're nothing much to write home about.
THE SWARM: You are disingenuous. This vessel itself could be put to so many interesting uses by such as the Swarm.
THE DOCTOR: The TARDIS would never listen to you. She would destroy herself before letting herself become infested by you.
THE SWARM: We do not need to infest the vehicle, Doctor, when we are already inside you.

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) I shuddered. An oblique feeling washed through me, enervating every nerve and casting my spirits into awful gloom. I knew the Swarm was right - my own body was moving against my will. Even as I talked my physical form was marching out of that room and starting to retrace its footsteps. The wolfhound climbed down from his chair, and padded meekly after me. I didn't know it yet, but I was his new master. The creature had been left a mindless blank by the insects' exodus and he, poor dog, latched onto me, dogging my trailing scarf ends.

THE SWARM: We can make you do anything. We can make you take us anywhere in any time, but for now Earth will suffice. We have begun to adapt to it as our new home. Until now, we have had a very sheltered life.
THE DOCTOR: I don't wonder.
THE SWARM: We work, we feed our young, we protect our Queen, we build our glorious nests and we swarm in beautiful formation. Our wants are very little, really.
THE DOCTOR: Oh, but you'll want and want and want more and more - I've met your sort before.
THE SWARM: You make light of this, but we can sense you are furious and panicked. You feel desperate. You have no idea what to do about us. You've never felt so alone in the face of an enemy. We are all around you. We are inside you. We can alter your reality.
THE DOCTOR: Oh, I - I've seen your party tricks, I ... I've been lost inside a doll's house, in a circus ring, I've been chased by hideous cadavers. I've seen you bend reality all right.
THE SWARM: Fascinating. These things are in our future?
THE DOCTOR: Not if I can help it. I'm stopping this thing right now, I'm not returning you to Earth, I'm changing history and the future before you can even get there.
THE SWARM: But you are doomed, of course, Doctor. We are manifold, we are the hornet Swarm, and only you stand between us and the Earth, and you are very puny.
THE DOCTOR: Hah! I - I've seen off greater threats than you lot. What about the Pescatons, eh? Or the Trods? And the Vogons. The Krynoids were no slackers, I can tell you.
THE SWARM: Enough! You are blocking us with your nonsensical thoughts.
THE DOCTOR: Er - I do tend to do that, yes.
THE SWARM: We will control you, Doctor.
THE DOCTOR: I doubt it.
THE SWARM: Then look about you now. Look where you have led us. Did you mean to walk here with us?
THE DOCTOR: What?

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) Without even realising it, I had at last found my way back to the control room.

THE SWARM: Now who can't control you?
THE DOCTOR: Rubbish! What are you lot anyway, just some kind of space vermin, a swarm of fleas, hopping from one host to the next. You've got nothing to offer the Universe, you can't

even make honey.
THE SWARM: Guard your tongue.

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) With a single impulse, the hornets gave me a taste of the most intense mental agony. I knew for certain that her words were quite true - they *could* do what they wanted with me. The stinging abated for a moment and I slumped over the control console. I could feel the millions of tiny legs and feelers tapping away inside me. I shuddered. My whole body shook with affronted fury.

THE SWARM: Now, pilot this strange magical ship of yours, Doctor. Take us back into the world, back into Time. We have a destiny to meet.

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) My hands moved across the controls with expertise and precision. I watched in appalled fascination...
(TARDIS dematerialisation sound.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) ... as they made me enter coordinates, and set the TARDIS in flight. My bitten hand sped expertly across the controls, the wound healing all the time with Gallifreyan efficiency. Meanwhile, the dog himself sat watching me, quite docile now. He seemed unharmed. Perhaps then there *was* some hope for the hosts that the hornets abandoned. Suddenly, asserting my own self-will, I reached out to touch the controls again, and experienced what felt like a huge electric shock. I screamed out in pain as the insects colonising my mind stung me again and again, until I was shaking and sobbing on the gleaming floor. They wouldn't let me interfere. The time rotor rose and fell smoothly and easily as we skipped across the vortex like a pebble flung across a lake. We were in flight, and the hornets wouldn't let me tamper with or cancel our course.

THE SWARM: The Earth is waiting for us.
THE DOCTOR: You mustn't interfere with human development. You must let them be.
THE SWARM: To us *they* are the insects. We have judged the place right and proper for our new home.
THE DOCTOR: I've dealt with so many like you lot, who see the rich pickings of Earth and decide they must seize them for themselves. Zygons, Axons, Nestenes, The Kraal. You know...
(TARDIS materialisation.)

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) But I broke off as the rotor slowed to a halt. We had landed on Earth once again. But where had I brought us to, and in which period? Fight as I might, the hornets seemed at times unstoppable. They seized hold of my damaged hand and drew it to the door control.
(TARDIS door opened.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) With a smooth hum, the TARDIS exterior doors slowly opened.

THE DOCTOR: No. You won't make me go out there, not against my own will. I refuse to inflict the Swarm on another time and place.
THE SWARM: You will do exactly as we command. You will be our vehicle spreading our influence far and wide. Who are the rulers of this world, whose minds should we pour ourselves into?
THE DOCTOR: I will resist you with every fibre of my being.
THE SWARM: It is quite futile.

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) Captain, the wolfhound, was tired of being cooped up inside the ship. When he glimpsed the daylight beyond the doors and sniffed the new air out there, he naturally went bounding towards it.

THE DOCTOR: Captain, no! Stay here! Stay here, boy.

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) I had to get us both away from here. I had to close the doors. I could feel the hornets within me itching to be out. For so long since their arrival on Earth they had been in unforgiving inhospitable climes. In the frozen Dark Ages, inside the mind of a pig, places as dark and dull as the stretches of Space from whence they came, but now there was

this new place. They led me outside, I felt them tumble and churn towards freedom, leaving me. Yes! In their eagerness to swarm and flourish in the warm new air, they were leaving my body. I moved in a cloud of insects, my battered defences buzzing, the dog jumping at my heels, confused and snapping at our tiny foes. I felt the last of them drain out of me, and blossom into the humid air.
(Buzzing of multiple insects.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) My sense of triumph was short-lived, however. A dark cloud of them whirled about me, a miniature cyclone noisy with hate. Wherever I had brought them, they were free now to seek new allies, new hosts. They whirled and spiralled away from me, and all my work was undone. No longer were they contained and the Earth safe. What had I done?

THE DOCTOR: No, come back!

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) We had arrived in brilliant bewildering sunshine. The skies were azure and crystalline. I could smell the sea, or rather, brackish water.
(Lapping water.)

THE DOCTOR: Captain, come on. We have to find them. We can't just let them take over some other poor soul.

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) The Swarm was nearby, probing gingerly with its hive mind, looking for humans, looking for beings with complex minds and subtle desires and needs and dangerous thoughts. Somewhere beyond these ruined half-submerged buildings lay a swampy lagoon, and beyond that I could see the towers and domes of a magical city. It was shimmering in the haze of the endless waters.
(Chiming clock.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) Somewhere, a clock chimed the hour. These surroundings were ringing a nasty bell somewhere inside my addled brain. Captain dashed across a square and was at the very lip of a sluggish green canal. A vista of narrow houses and higgledy-piggledy rooftops opened up around us. He turned to look back at me wagging his tail. We were in Venice. Why did that realisation suddenly strike terror into both my hearts, mm? A lagoon. We were near a lagoon. We were at the very frangible edges of the ancient city. Why did that mean something to me? Come on, Doctor, think. Think. Disturbed, I called Captain once again more urgently, but he had the fermenting reek of the lagoon waters in his nostrils, so tantalising, that imbroglio of sweetly-decaying scents. I noticed then that we weren't alone. A small human figure was sitting at the very edge of the water just beside us. He had been watching us ever since our arrival. He was staring at the TARDIS in wonderment. Oh no. A child, a lumpish distorted figure, misshapen, crooked back, dwarfish? He looked perplexed and cross as Captain barked the odds. All around the child, the hornets were massing. As soon as they had emerged from the TARDIS they had found their new prey, their new host. Captain and I were there to witness it.

THE DOCTOR: Run! Get away from here, child!

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) The tiny hunchback gasped out loud as the swarm descended - he didn't have time to be frightened. The air filled rapidly with their thick heavy noise. Captain yelped helplessly, then merely growled and whimpered as the hornets poured into the small, crooked body of the boy. Antonio stared at us both through the moat-filled air, and tried to scream. Why weren't we helping him? Why did we just stand there? He opened his mouth and the insects streamed in. I would have recognised him anywhere. I had known him as an adult. I had seen him in his own far future. Here there was none of that adult corruption and greed about him. My hearts ached for him, and for what the future had in store. I was helpless to stop them as the hornets hurled themselves into the air and into their new home. This was when and how they took over Antonio the circus master, and I had made it possible. It was all because of me. Captain howled, and Antonio was weirdly silent as the last of the hornets entered his broken form. There was nothing I could do now. Once the air was clear the boy turned on his heel, snapping into action with almost supernatural speed. He was away for guttersnipe. He knew the decaying fringes of the city of Venice better than anyone. When he pelted off away from us, Captain and I gave chase, but to no avail.

THE DOCTOR: We've lost him, Captain. We've lost him.

THE DOCTOR: (narrating) The child and the Swarm were at large somewhere in Venice in Seventeen Sixty-Eight. Antonio was possessed of unearthly powers that he would soon learn to use to his own deadly advantage. Captain and I walked for days in our search, the dog always bounding ahead, sniffing the rich air, catching a million scents which bamboozled him. If someone goes to ground in Venice and doesn't want to be caught, he won't be. It is a city that welcomes the furtive, the secretive, and repels those seeking him. During that time, I learned what year it was, and calculated that as I suspected, I had brought my enemies to just the right point in time to make the rest of their story inevitable. The web of Time had healed itself. It had bent me to its will to make sure everything ran with deadly efficiency. On the fourth day I began to accept that we had lost our enemies. They had gone to ground. All I could do was leave, and hope to fight them again, another day, in another place.
(TARDIS dematerialisation sound.)
THE DOCTOR: (narrating) Back aboard the TARDIS at last, the console flashed and glimmered as we took flight. History was on track, and I felt hollow inside. I knew that somewhere in our temporal wake, Antonio would grow from a child into a man, one who limped his cunning way through the Eighteenth Century, steadily growing older, stronger, more skilled and malevolent. He would create his own evil circus to run away to, and leave Venice eventually. He would tour the continent, drawing young ladies away from their homes, making them master the most peculiar circus skills.

THE DOCTOR: I'd seen it all happen, hadn't I, Mike? I had witnessed the fate of the marvellous Francesca, seen the hornets take over her body and dash it straight to the ground, breaking her like a perfect doll. I had failed to prevent her brother, mad with grief I imagine, from stealing her body, embalming it, tending to it obsessively for the rest of his life until somehow, one hundred years later, only her feet remained, still shod in their exquisite satin slippers.
MIKE YATES: The very slippers that got stolen from the Palace of Curios in the Thirties.
THE DOCTOR: Quite right, Mike.
MIKE YATES: There's something I've been meaning to ask. You've shown me there's a direct line running from that porcine Mother Superior right through to Cromer and Mrs Wibbsey, hundreds of years in which this hornet swarm has festered and gathered in some pretty dark recesses, but - what happened to it, once you repelled them from poor Ernestina?
THE DOCTOR: You could say that was my greatest mistake. But the hornets were still new to me, I hadn't yet fully understood their modus operandum. Because her self-will appeared to have returned, I thought I'd driven them out of the poor girl, but in fact I'd done no such thing. They were still there, merely waiting, dormant and forgotten. And even though Ernestina married and led an apparently normal life, the hornet song continued thrumming quietly through the years, audible only to those of a particularly sensitive nature. Her grandson Percival was one such boy. He became obsessed with taxidermy, and built a business on his interest, rescuing and restoring stuffed animals of all kinds. It was Percy Noggins who drew me into this whole business in the first place. Remember, Mike? Him and his demonic stuffed animals, padding round in the night, buzzing fiercely with the bees, or rather hornets, in their bonnets.
MIKE YATES: And so this is where it ends up. Here, in Nest Cottage. Your home from home in Sussex, which incidentally you still haven't explained. I mean, I never imagined you were into real estate.
THE DOCTOR: You wouldn't want to know everything about me, would you, Mike? I certainly wouldn't want to know everything...
MIKE YATES: All right, all right. The point is, here we are, back where the story began.
THE DOCTOR: Back for the final confrontation. I've seen history in the making, Mike, I've watched in appalled helpless fascination as the hornets have made their way through the decades towards this day. I couldn't stop any of it, until now. I may have been instrumental in spreading their influence but I've been successful in containing them too. There's nothing to be done about the past, but what we must do now is face the hornets here, and destroy them.
MIKE YATES: Together?
THE DOCTOR: Yes. If I'm not mistaken, dawn is arriving.
MIKE YATES: It's certainly quieter upstairs.
THE DOCTOR: The possessed sleep in the daytime because the hornets find it easier to exert their control at night. They are creatures of twilight, from the inky depths of Space.

MIKE YATES: I suppose the question is, Doctor, what can I do to help? You've been put through your paces by these monsters - I'm gratified you should call on me for help - but mystified. It's the Twenty-First Century. There are younger, better-equipped people around these days, you know. Why on Earth did you call for me?
THE DOCTOR: Don't take this the wrong way, Mike, but I don't entirely know. You see, until Mrs Wibbsey relayed your telephone message to me, I had no idea I had placed that magazine advert.
MIKE YATES: But the references. It - it must have come from you.
THE DOCTOR: Or someone close to me, someone who knows my situation, and a little of my past.
MIKE YATES: Mrs ... Wibbsey?
THE DOCTOR: I'm afraid it seems likely. She tried to insist that I had simply forgotten, but...
MIKE YATES: That still doesn't explain why me. What possible role could *I* have to play in all this?
THE DOCTOR: What indeed? I should think the answer to that lies ahead of us. Here. Drink your tea. Soon Mrs Wibbsey will be up and about.
(Banging on door.)
MRS WIBBSEY: Are you down there? What's been going on?
MIKE YATES: Right on cue.
THE DOCTOR: In the daytime she's fairly harmless.
MRS WIBBSEY: Doctor? Are you and your friend wanting breakfast?
THE DOCTOR: Yes please, Mrs Wibbsey. Full English, if you don't mind. And porridge for Mr Yates. We've a long day ahead of us.
MRS WIBBSEY: Not as long as mine.
MIKE YATES: I don't like the sound of her. Are you certain she's under your hypnotic control?
THE DOCTOR: Not certain, no. We'd better go up.
MIKE YATES: I'll go first, just in case.
THE DOCTOR: There's no need for that. They'll all be asleep again.
MIKE YATES: All the same, I'm expendable, you're not.
MRS WIBBSEY: I can't bring breakfast down there to you.
THE DOCTOR: Right you are. We're coming out.
MIKE YATES: There could be anything on the other side of that door waiting for us.
(Banging on door.)
MRS WIBBSEY: Doctor?
THE DOCTOR: Everything in this house of mine has been under the hornets' spell at one time or another. Mrs Wibbsey, the animals, even me, Mike.
MRS WIBBSEY: There's really nothing to be scared of.
THE DOCTOR: Ready, Captain Yates?
MIKE YATES: As I'll ever be.
(Door opened. Barking, snarling and growling of many beasts.)

(Tom Baker's closing Doctor Who theme, composed by Ron Grainer.)

ANNOUNCER: (Tom Baker) Hornets' Nest - A Sting In The Tale, by Paul Magrs, starred Tom Baker and Richard Franklin. The Nun was played by Clare Corbett, The Sister was Susie Riddell. The Swarm was Rula Lenska, and Mrs Wibbsey was Susan Jameson. The Script Editor was Michael Stevens. It was Produced and Directed by Kate Thomas, and is published by BBC Audio Books.

Transcribed by David Tait